



The Cherry Tree



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Command Ombudsman Newsletter

June/July 2004

USS George Washington (CVN 73)

The Captain's Call

Captain M. J. Erdosy
Commanding Officer, USS George Washington (CVN 73)

Hello Family and Friends of George Washington! Hard to believe it is time for another newsletter! We are doing very well here at sea in support of the "new" country of Iraq's transition to sovereignty! Our Sailors have stayed very busy this cruise with the important work of support of our troops ashore in Iraq. This work has resulted in a slight delay in our return to you, but we all know how important our small sacrifices are to the effort ashore.

Professionally, the crew has been doing fine. They've had lots of time studying for the next rating exam and completing their Enlisted Warfare Qualifications. We have had great success during the advancement announcements that have been made this cruise, and we have qualified about 1,500 sailors for their Warfare Pins!

We have just completed a few days of liberty in the port of Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates. As a port we have visited several times this cruise, the Sailors really know their way around, have found the best restaurants and know the best bargains when shopping. The next port will be a little different as it will be a European port on our way home. It will be nice to have the change of scenery and a different selection while shopping for our homecoming gifts!

I know that our support groups have many activities scheduled to help prepare for our return. We also have a shipboard Return Reunion Program scheduled for our return trip. This program will help prepare our Sailors for the challenges we will experience when we return. Topics covered include advice on how to have a successful reunion with family members, how to buy a car, driver safety for those of us who haven't driven in over six months and many other topics that have proven to be valuable to Sailors returning from long deployments.

Yes, we will be home soon! Please stay involved in the support group activities, this is the best way to keep in the know about what is happening with regard to the activities surrounding our return and our schedule. While I can no longer say that we will be home on time, remember that the short delay was for good reason! We will see you soon! Good on you!

Sincerely,

Captain Marty

CMC's Take

CMDCM(SW/AW/SCW) Scott Benning
Command Master Chief, USS George Washington (CVN 73)

Wow! Can you believe it is June already? The homecoming is just around the corner now, but we are not there yet. I know everyone back home is getting very excited. We are also getting excited, but we need to remain focused on the month ahead. As you talk with your Sailor via phone or e-mail, please continue to encourage them to remain focused on the task at hand. Also, a word from home to ask how their qualifications and studying for that next advancement exam may show them that you want them to continue to focus on their success. The encouragement from home will mean a great deal and motivate them greatly.

This month brings with it another important event on the calendar, as we will celebrate Father's Day. For all of the kids back home who are without your dad because he is here, always know that Father's Day brings to us a sense of joy in knowing that we have great kids that understand the sense of service and understand the need for sacrifice to ensure the safety of our nation and citizens. For all of the Dad's of our Sailors who will not be able to spend time with your son or daughter or even a phone call on this Father's Day, we thank you for providing us a foundation that has taught us the importance of service to our Nation and the support you continue to provide all of us that helps us achieve continued success.

Speaking of celebrations, our History and Heritage Committee conducted another great event. They conducted a Memorial Day and Battle of Midway observance. The service was great and included a wreath laying, 21-gun salute provided by our outstanding weapons department and a display of our Flag Team that especially made the ceremony special. Most importantly, this was a coming together as a crew to remember those that have served before us to ensure freedom, and who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our great nation.

Jebel Ali the third time was another great visit and a great opportunity for the entire crew to relax. I know that everyone here is very much looking forward to USS John F. Kennedy arriving on station so that we can point ourselves west and start heading in the right direction. As we start heading home I know all of you are gearing up for the Final Fling and the events that lead up to the homecoming. Please use the time remaining to attend a Family Support Group meeting and to learn more information about all of the great activities that the support groups put together. It is a great place to meet new people, get information on our return and, if you desire, to volunteer your time in supporting the group. Our Family Support Groups are so important to our Sailors, their families and mission accomplishment. I've heard Capt. Erdosy mention many times that mission accomplishment begins at home. It is a great quote and emphasizes how important our families are to all of our Sailors.

As we start approaching our last month of deployment, I want to thank all of you for your continued support. Be safe back home and be careful as the temperatures start to rise and summer approaches. All of you are the best and we look forward to seeing you on the pier in the near future. Have a great Navy day.

CMC Scott Benning

Enlisted Family Support Group and Officer Support Group news!

Final Fling tickets are on sale now! Contact Luanne Beatty at summercelebration73@yahoo.com for more information. Seating is limited, so hurry fast and get your ticket! The last day to purchase your ticket is June 26. The price for tickets are E-6 and below \$5, E-7 through E-9 \$10 and all officers \$15. Friends and family are welcome.

June 24– Changing Seasons Boutique – We will be having an adult social and shopping from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the boutique. Everyone is being given a 10% discount at the boutique on this night and 15 percent of the total spent from our group will be donated in gifts to the Final Fling night for door prizes. RSVP to gwosc@cox.net by June 20 and Michelle will e-mail directions out to those who request them.

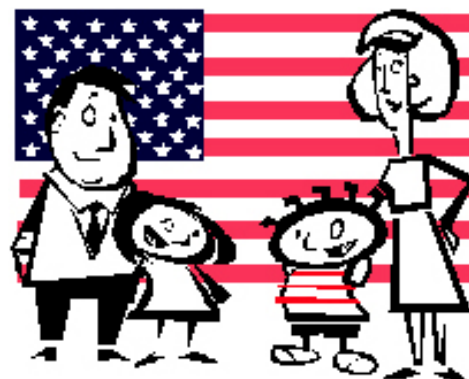
June 30 – Skate Night – Greenbrier Family Skating Center is offering all military free skate rental and entry fee. Come out and have a blast seeing who is on floor and who can remain on skates.

July 10- there will be a Kids' Final Fling Carnival at NAS Oceana. Watch for more details.



The day Sailors step off *USS George Washington's* brow and onto the pier in Norfolk to receive their hero's welcome is a feeling unparalleled by anything else in the world. For many new father's, it is the first opportunity they will have to see and hold their children who were born while they were on deployment.

Don't forget about "First Kid" and "First Kiss" drawing. Ticket are \$1 each. Winners will be announced at the Final Fling Celebration on July 8.



For information on homecoming and upcoming activities, e-mail GWHOMECOMING2004@aol.com.

George Washington welcomes new third classes

By JO2(SW) John Osborne

Hangar Bay 2 was alive with energy yesterday as hundreds of Sailors gathered to congratulate their shipmates on being advanced to the rank of third class petty officer. Despite the day's heat and the fatigue from four months of a deployment, everyone present felt invigorated with a sense of satisfaction in watching the 187 E-3s salute Commanding Officer, Capt. Martin Erdossy, and officially join the honored ranks of petty officers in the United States Navy. Erdossy himself said it is ceremonies such as this that stand out as highlights for him as a CO.

"It is a moment I live for," said Erdossy, still beaming with pride after the frocking. "Some people think of it as just a piece of paper, but it's more than that. It's having the acknowledgement that people appreciate and are proud of the sacrifices others are willing to make on the job."

Erdossy also said the presence of everyone in the hangar bay was a testament to how much every one of them cared about the careers of the Sailors in their charge. From their piers to their department heads, every frockee had the backing of people who cared.

"The commitment people have to Navy Core Values is exemplified by this frocking," he said. "Being successful on a rating exam includes teamwork. By that I mean the preparation when the chief sits down and teaches people how to study and points out the important elements of their rating. Those are tools that will help them not only in the Navy, but in any path they choose in life because it's an organized approach to solving a problem and accomplishing a task. When you look at this mass gaggle of people we were able to promote, you realize it was not only their hard work and dedication and study that went into it, but also the help of their shipmates."

Erdossy said he hoped the new petty realized that they now have responsibility to carry on with those same values and wanted to remind them the greatest enthusiasm and job satisfaction can often come from having hand in the success of the careers of people you work with. "If you are promoted, it's just you," Erdossy said. "But if your people get promoted you have so many other opportunities to be happy and thankful for their accomplishment. When I went to petty officer indoctrination and spoke at the final session to all of these young new petty officers, I told them how important it was for them to work with their peers and those who work for them so those people could make rate too. I described to them the satisfaction that you can get from your people making rate and being successful. That is every bit as important as your own success. It gives you the motivation you sometimes need to keep going and be successful in this very difficult profession we have selected."

Eleven of the 187 new petty officers were promoted through the command advancement program that allows the commanding officer to meritoriously advance a Sailor to the next paygrade. In addition, three Sailors were given a CAP to E-5 and one to E-6.



Air Boss, Cmdr. John Sheenan, congratulates YN3 Lashonda Tart on her advancement after the frocking ceremony. She was one of 187 E-3s to be advanced.

JO3 Elizabeth Enockson

Homecoming 'Survival Guide' for all Sailors and families

A great deal of attention is paid to the separation side of military deployment when military personnel leave families and partners for overseas operations. We can understand the worry and the feelings of loss and loneliness a military deployment can bring to a family. But the return and reunion with families and partners can be just as stressful — sometimes more so. The difficulties and strains of return can be surprising and sometimes painfully disappointing to military families. But there are steps you can take to make the transition back as joyful and stress-free as possible.

Understanding the ups and downs of reunion

Couples who have been separated by military deployment often look forward to a service member's return as a time of happiness, a chance to get back to "normal" life. Lovers and spouses miss each other and look forward to time together. Children look forward to having a missing parent back at home. The absent service member looks forward to a joyful reunion and the comforts of home. After a dangerous deployment, families are relieved that the service member is returning home safely.

But mixed in with those feelings of excitement and anticipation are also some perfectly normal worries and resentments. Husbands and wives worry that their spouse has changed, that there will be new strains in the relationship. Both partners may dread giving up the independence that being apart has allowed them, and may resent what they imagine as the freedom the other has enjoyed during deployment. While everyone looks forward happily to getting back together, they may also feel some anger at having been separated in the first place (a feeling that children sometimes express very openly).

Reunions can be especially challenging if the deployment was longer or more dangerous than usual, if the deployment created serious money problems for the family, if communicating back home was more difficult than expected, if the deployment is just the latest in a series of deployments, or if there are feelings of jealousy or rumors of infidelity. Without these special strains, reunions are generally much less stressful.

The initial reunion often *is* happy. But because expectations on all sides are so high, it can also be disappointing. The list of opportunities for crushed hopes is a long one.

As homecoming day gets closer, please remember that for security and safety reasons we cannot give any direct information over the phone. Keep this in mind before you make the call. Information will be freely discussed at the support group and homecoming meetings. As always, we are here to help you in any way that we can!

What can make return from deployment an unhappy and stressful time is the mismatch between high expectations and the reality of family life, and the need to change and fit into new family roles and routines. But knowing this is also the key to making the return a happy time with a minimum of stress and disappointment.

Before the reunion

Despite the best of intentions, the service member or the partner at home may be too exhausted, busy, or anxious to prepare the way they would like to for the reunion. Combined with high expectations — and sometimes unrealistic hopes — for the reunion, this can lead to disappointment.

Unpredictable timing can also get in the way of happy and relaxed reunions. Both partners need to understand that late flights, bad weather, incorrect passenger lists, family emergencies, and missed phone calls or messages can spoil even the most careful plans.

What you can do

- Do your best to find out and communicate the details of the return plan*, and to keep yourself and your partner updated on any changes to the schedule.

- Make backup plans* in case the flight arrives at a time when the partner at home can't be there. This might happen because of a work schedule, children's needs, a family emergency, or simply lack of advance notice. How will the service member get home? Are there phone numbers where the partner at home can be reached at different times of day and night?

- Plan something special for each other*. The returning service member might bring gifts for those at home. The partner at home might plan a welcome-back meal or some other celebration.

- Be ready to be understanding and forgiving* if the reality of the reunion doesn't match your plans and hopes.

The day of the reunion

Be prepared for exhaustion. Jet lag (for Sailors from Whidbey Island who must fly to the West Coast from Norfolk) and unpredictability and changes in the return schedule. Be prepared, too, for reactions to the return that aren't what either or both of you may have expected.

The partner at home may have planned a joyful welcome, for example, with banners, gifts, or favorite foods, only to find the service member too exhausted to notice. A gift from overseas may not be received with the appreciation the returning service member expected. Babies and young children may pull away from or cry at the returning parent's efforts to hold and hug them. (It takes time for young children to get to know a parent again after a long absence.)

What the returning service member can do

- Be patient if no one is there to meet you when you arrive*. Use your backup plan to call someone or get yourself home. Understand that changes in your return schedule, a missed message, or family or work responsibilities are probably the reasons, not a lack of desire to see you as soon as possible.

- Make a conscious effort to make only positive comments* about any changes you notice when you get home. Try to keep this up for at least the first two days.

- Look for positive changes*, such as how your children have grown and matured, new skills they have learned, or household improvements your spouse has managed. Tell family members that you are proud of them.

- Show your appreciation for the extra work your spouse has taken on* while you were away, handling all of the household responsibilities alone. Don't criticize the ways your partner is handling these added tasks, even if it's very different from how you would do it. Many returning service members feel a little hurt at finding out how well their families have managed without them. Do your best to express this instead as pride in how they've stepped up to new responsibilities.

·Expect that your children might not welcome you back immediately with smiles and hugs. Very young children may see you as a stranger at first and be shy or even scared of you. Be patient as they take the time to get to know you and accept you as a parent again. Older children may be angry at you for being away so long, at least at first. Teenagers may hold back as a way to try on new independence. Try to remember that these are all natural responses for children at different ages.

What the spouse or partner at home can do

·Do something special to welcome the returning service member home. Make a banner, prepare a meal with your partner's favorite foods, or have your children make a special homecoming gift. But don't be hurt if your spouse is too tired on first arriving to notice how you've prepared.

·Expect your spouse to be a little hurt at seeing how well you have managed on your own. Explain that while you're proud that you were able to keep things going, you want to get back to sharing those responsibilities. Talk about who will do what now that you're both home.

The first week

Husbands and wives often report feeling like strangers to each other in the first hours and days of return. Couples sometimes have problems, too, with different expectations about how they'll spend these first few days. A service member looking forward to an escape from the rigid routine of deployment, for example, might not react well to a spouse's tightly scheduled plans for the first few days after return. After an exciting or dangerous deployment, a service member may want quiet time at home. After a dull deployment, the service member may want to get out and do all the activities he or she has been missing.

Both partners may have trouble with expectations about how quickly the returning service member will take on household tasks. Some service members may want to be included in family decisions right away, while others may want to get involved again more gradually, allowing their partners to make decisions for them for the first few days. The partner at home may be eager or reluctant to give up some of these decision-making roles.

What the returning service member can do

·Make time for your family. Hold off on visits to relatives and limit time with friends until you've settled into a comfortable routine at home.

·Take time to talk with your spouse or partner. After a long absence, you need to get to know each other again. You've both had new experiences that may have changed your priorities and your ideas about roles in the marriage and the family. Talking now can help you lay the foundation for a newly strengthened relationship.

·Expect that intimacy and sexual relations may be awkward at first. Go slowly. Your time apart really has made you strangers to each other in many ways. Make an effort to be patient and charming, much as you did when you were first dating.

·Take time to understand how the family has changed while you've been gone. Don't charge in with your own way of getting things done. Notice how your spouse is dealing with your children's discipline, for example, and restrain yourself from taking over with a tougher or looser approach.

·Ease back into the relationship and your family. Understand that your spouse may have grown accustomed to managing more of the household responsibilities, and may not be eager to turn control of them all back to you right away.

·Spend time alone with each member of your family. Think of things to do with your children that you each enjoy and that will give you time to talk and have fun together in a relaxed way.

·Watch your spending. It can be tempting to celebrate your return with dinners out or special gifts. Be careful not to get into debt trouble that could take you months or even years to repay. Time together and attention to each other's needs is far more valuable.

What the spouse or partner at home can do

·Don't over-schedule the first days after the return. The regimentation and strict routine of deployment can leave service members craving unscheduled time and hoping for a relief from constant responsibilities.

·Don't expect your spouse to jump in and start taking care of household chores and tasks just as before. The long trip home leaves most service members in need of rest in order to adjust to a change in time zones. Even the change from military food to home-cooked food can be an adjustment. Give it time, talk about what needs to be done, and let your spouse take on household

tasks at a pace that's comfortable for both of you.

·*Spend time talking with each other.* You've both been through separate experiences during your spouse's deployment, and you've both changed in some ways as a result. You've learned how to manage the household on your own and become used to life on your own. Your spouse has faced new experiences, possibly some very intense ones, and has become used to being away from you and the family. Talking can help you get to know each other again, to regain the intimacy you had before, and to rebuild family routines that include you both.

·*Expect your children to test the rules now that both parents are home.* Whenever there's a change in a family, children work to find out whether it might mean any loosening of limits. Talk with your spouse (when the children can't hear you) to explain any new rules you've set, so that you can present a united front. Together, apply rules fairly and consistently.

·*Watch your spending.* You've managed to a budget during your spouse's deployment. Now that you're back together as a family you'll have some added expenses (another adult mouth to feed, for one thing). Don't lose control of the budget celebrating your partner's return.

·*Don't give up activities that you enjoy and that help you relax.* If you've adopted an exercise routine, taken up a hobby you like, or joined a regular book group, don't give it up just because your partner is home. You may need to be flexible to fit these activities into the new family schedule, but do your best to find a way.

Later on

You may have trouble "re-sorting" the way household responsibilities are divided — who makes which decisions, and who takes care of which household tasks. One of you may want to move more quickly than the other to get back to the way you had split those roles before the deployment, or to change the way those roles are divided now that you have had a chance to try a different way of splitting them. This re-sorting of responsibilities and any other small changes in routine can make either of you feel unwanted and unappreciated. It is common for people to overreact as they readjust to life as a couple.

Differences and problems can arise over children, too. Returning service members sometimes reassert their role as a parent by spoiling the children or by disciplining them too strictly.

If the deployment has caused financial hardship, you and your partner may react in very different ways now that life is getting back to "normal." Some people overspend in an effort to catch up with everything they have missed out on during the deployment. Others over-control family spending as they try to get the budget back in balance and cover the extra costs of deployment, such as charges for long-distance phone calls.

Talking through these adjustments can be harder if the service member has seen or experienced violent action during deployment. War is often an ugly business, with many innocent victims, and the experience of war may be hard to talk about, even years later. In time, the service member may want to discuss some of these things if others are willing to listen patiently, without judging.

What you both can do together

·*Keep talking.* Talk can help you get back together as a couple and as a family. Talk through your differences about household responsibilities and decision-making.

·*Don't force talk about the experience of war, but be open to it when the time is right.* If the service member is not ready to talk about his or her experiences during deployment, don't push it. It's often a better idea for the service member to talk through any tough experiences first with a chaplain, a family service center counselor, or another trusted adviser or friend. If you do talk about painful experiences as a couple, try hard to listen without judging.

·*Be patient with each other and with your children.* It takes time to regroup as a family, and you can't rush a natural process. The service member should make a gradual effort to resume his or her role as an engaged parent — without buying the children's affection through spoiling or forcing the children's obedience with unnecessarily strict discipline.

·*Seek professional help if you think there is a problem.* Some anger and some tears can be expected after a long or difficult deployment, but excessive anger, mean-spirited fighting, and violence are signs that you need help. Don't feel that you have to solve serious emotional problems on your own.

GW celebrates past military heroes

By JOSN(SW) Jennifer Crowell

Sailors on board *USS George Washington* took time out of their busy schedules to attend a Memorial Day ceremony June 3 in Hangar Bay 2 to remember those who gave their lives in the line of duty.

As the master of ceremonies, HTCS(SW/AW) Douglas Fisher, ER Division's leading chief petty officer, began the ceremony by discussing the day's origin. "Memorial Day was established as a national holiday in 1868 to pay tribute to those who died in service to our country," he said. "Since World War II, Memorial Day has become a day when the country honors all Americans who died fighting in any of our nation's wars."

While the ceremony paid tribute to the service members killed in action, S-8's SKCS(SW/AW) Cedric Glover and OI Division's Leading Chief Petty Officer OSC(SW/AW) James Daniels delivered the Medal of Honor citations for two Sailors. Capt. Michael Estocin and SN David Ouellet posthumously received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the Vietnam War.



PH3(AW/SW) Leah Stiles

Rear Adm. Denby Starling, Capt. Kenneth Floyd, Capt. Tom Copeman and Capt. Martin Erdossy toss a wreath into the water to pay tribute to fellow Sailors who made the ultimate sacrifice during the country's wars.

"Estocin was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam on April 20 and 26, 1967," said Glover. "He is the only Navy jet pilot to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in a combat zone."

"Ouellet put himself between his shipmates and a grenade while transiting a river," Daniels said. "His extraordinary heroism and his courageous actions to help his comrades are in the finest tradi-

tions of the United States Navy."

While Memorial Day was the central theme for the event, MACM(SW) Gregory Ciaccio talked about the battle of Midway. "The Japanese lost four carriers while the Americans lost only one," he said.

Shortly after, *Commander, GW Strike Group*, Rear Adm. Denby Starling, *GW's* Commanding Officer, Capt. Martin J. Erdossy, *Commander, Carrier Air Wing 7*, Capt. Kenneth Floyd, and *Commodore, Destroyer Squadron 28*, Capt. Tom Copeman, paid their re-

spects to fallen service members during the wreath-laying, as G-2's honor guard rendered a 21-gun salute.

While DCC(SW/AW) Mark Devoe played "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes, CS7's FC1(SW) Roxy Lyons said it was exciting to have a part in the ceremony. "It's very humbling to be able to participate," he said after playing "Taps" during a trumpet solo. "A lot of people gave their lives for the freedom I enjoy today."



PHAN Jessica Davis

***USS George Washington's* Flag Team put on a stellar performance during the Memorial Day/Battle of Midway Celebration, honoring all of those who fought and died in service of their country.**



J03 (SW) Elizabeth Enockson

DCC(SW/AW) Mark Devoe takes time out to play "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes during the Memorial Day service.

Deployed parents give the gift of freedom

Story and photo by AN Honey Nixon

Walk around any given day on *USS George Washington* and you will see their faces neatly placed on lockers, proudly displayed as screensavers on computers in work centers and sometimes taking the form of light in a Sailor's eye whenever their names are uttered. These faces belong to children of United States Sailors. From the first goodbye to the final welcome home, they have been a part of many sendoffs and reunions during their parents' military careers.

Some Sailors are veterans of handling good-byes prior to deployment, but there will always be the first time they leave home not only as a Sailor, but a parent as well. So, just how does a Sailor navigate the turbulent seas of parenting while on deployment?

YN3(AW) Ericka Ross from *Strike Fighter Squadron 131* describes her goodbye to daughter, Asharia, who will be one year old next month, as an emotional roller coaster. "It was so hard leaving my baby," she said. "She was just months old when I left. I was fine all day long, laughing and playing with her, but later in the day when it came time to hand her to my mother at the bus station, I just broke down," she said. While Ross knows she may



YN3(AW) Ericka Ross holds one of many pictures of her daughter Asharia. Bringing pictures of their children on deployment helps many Sailors feel closer to those they leave behind.

sometimes miss critical milestones in Asharia's life, she also knows the Navy provides a secure lifestyle. "I feel lucky. Being in the Navy I don't have to worry about money or medical bills. I try to focus on the positives."

Although the monetary benefits may be plentiful, Sailors still must find ways to keep up the lines of communication back home. AO1(AW) Steven Spann of IM3's Ordnance Shop, strives to remain a daily presence in his seven-year-old son Xavier's life. "Instead of taking my money and spending it on partying or buying clothes, I set aside some money and buy calling cards," he said. "I call my son at least every other day and talk to him while he gets ready for school. I don't wait a week and use up the entire card on

one phone call. I stretch it out by using two or three minutes a day. That way I feel I am there. The best thing you can do is keep a constant line of communication open."

Spann knows calling his son consistently isn't the only thing that will impact Xavier positively. He also knows maintaining professionalism at work reflects on Xavier's future be-

cause Sailors' actions out at sea have a ripple effect on those waiting back at home. "What you do at sea affects your child," he said. "If you go to Captain's Mast or stay in trouble, your child will suffer the consequences. You have to remember, once you are a parent it is not just about you anymore. It is easy to say 'I have a child,' but it is much harder to say 'I am a parent.'"

Some Sailors take great pride in not only being a *parent* but at being a part of a strong family unit as well. AM1(AW) Lynn Johnson, attached to *Electronic Attack Squadron 140*, is well aware that keeping family cohesion while one parent is deployed takes teamwork. She credits her husband, Randy, for weaving a web of normalcy for their daughters,

see **PARENTS** on Page 10

Cheyenne, 16, and Jessica, 10. “I cannot thank my husband enough for giving me the support that enables me to focus on what I need to do out here at sea,” she said. “We try to keep things as normal as possible when I leave, so there is little disruption in the girls’ routine. He writes e-mails daily and sends me pictures to keep me updated on everything back home.”

Sailors can also find comfort in programs GW offers which enhance the flow of communication with loved ones. There are a variety of opportunities, including United Through Reading, Sailor telephones and e-mail access. One program in particular, the video teleconference, offers Sailors and their families simultaneous visual and audio access via satellite. Johnson is one of the many Sailors to take advantage of this rare opportunity. “As time drew near for my VTC appointment, my heart was in my throat just thinking about it,” she said. But when the moment arrived, Johnson was surprised at her reactions. “I was so afraid that when I saw them, I would break down. But as soon as I saw the girls’ faces and my husband sitting in the middle with his arms stretched around them, I lit up like a Christmas tree! I had expected the mood to be somber for all of us, but they were making funny faces at me. It was wonderful to see them happy and smiling. Instead of leaving the room in tears, as I expected, I came out beaming. Those few minutes were priceless.”

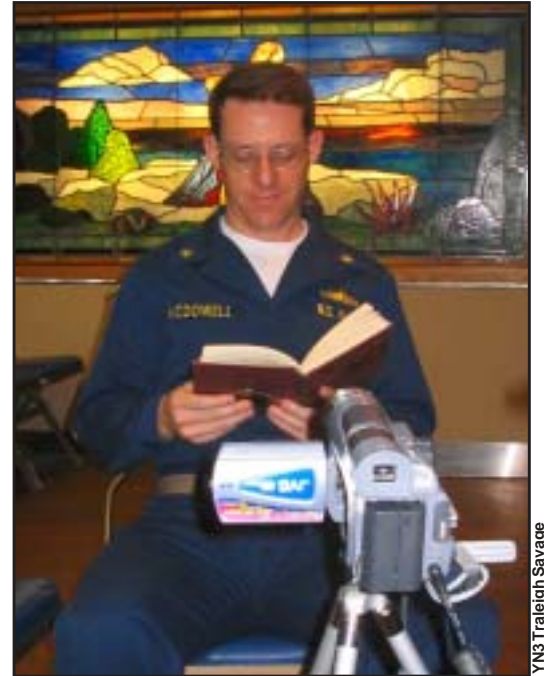
Father of four, CMDRCM(AW/SS) Terence Hren of VFA -131, considers his children at a distinct advantage. He believes children of deployed Sailors receive a sense of security from their parents’ involvement in the Navy. “There are many kids out there that take our country for granted,” he said. “I think children in the military appreciate more what it is to be an American because they realize that there is always someone out here looking out for them, and that this protection comes at a price.”

Parenting Sailors often worry about the repeated cycles of coming and going and how this affects their children. However, there will come a day when they will never again have to say, “I’m back for now.” This time they can say, “I am back for good.” No more rushed good-byes or teary glances cast over shoulders as they leave their loved ones behind, because they have come home not indefinitely, but permanently.

SKC(AW/SW) Rodney Jackson is just such a Sailor. Seventeen years in the Navy has made him no stranger to the inevitable adjustment of being home again after time at sea. He credits the leave period with making his transition easier. “It’s important to remember that your spouse functions as a single parent while you are gone,” he said. “Leave time is important so that your family can get used to you being back home. By having the leave period, it helps everyone fall back into a routine little by little.”

The father of three eagerly awaits his final homecoming from the 2004 deployment, and his family welcomes him back with the knowledge that this is the last time they will have to say goodbye. What is the first thing he will do upon his return? “I am going to hug my children—just hug them tight. Then I am taking them anywhere they ask to go,” Jackson chuckles, “I have a feeling it just might be Chuck E. Cheese.”

While Sailors will continue to encounter parenting challenges unique to the military lifestyle, they might take comfort in knowing that many parents can say they give the gift of life, but only a brave few can say they give the gift of freedom.



Lt. Cmdr. David McDowell takes time out of his busy work schedule to read a book on tape to send home to his family. He is just one of the many Sailors who have taken advantage of the UTR program to keep in touch with loved ones.

YN3 Traleigh Savage

Department of the Navy
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USS George Washington (CVN-73)

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GW staying safe among friends!



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USS George Washington, flanked by USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) on starboard and USS Bulkley (DDG 84) on port, follows HMCS Toronto while being tailed by USNS Supply (T-AOE-6). Although GW may be the focus of attention, she could not complete her mission without these essential members of the George Washington Strike Group who guard, replenish and augment the carrier's power.